

BUILDERS CHOSEN FOR £1.7M FACILITY WITH ROOM FOR 24 CARAVANS



Work starts soon on legal travellers' site

■ Chosen site – the Severalls Lane land earlier this year when travellers arrived illegally

By ANDREA COLLITT
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THE creation of a legal travellers' site north of Colchester has moved a step closer after County Hall awarded a contract to build it.

Barnes Construction will be brought in to build the £1.7million, 12-pitch site in Severalls Lane, with work expected to start in the autumn.

The site was chosen when pitches in Haven Road, Colchester, were closed in 2004.

Renewed planning permission was granted by Colchester Council in November, but the site has been dogged by controversy since, and there was anger when travellers pitched there illegally earlier this year.

John Jowers, county councillor responsible for communities and planning, said the contract had been awarded for 12 pitches, with room for up to two caravans on each.

He forecast the site would be popular and could attract travellers set to be evicted from Europe's largest illegal site at Dale Farm, near Basildon, in south Essex.

He said: "We considered 62 sites during what was a really painful process.

"Nobody wants them, but, once you have sites, it is easier to

enforce removal at illegal encampments.

"Once you have made alternative provision, you can then enforce."

On the possible Dale Farm influx, he added: "Every single district and borough in East Anglia will be watching carefully what happens.

“We considered 62 sites during what was a really painful process. Nobody wants them

"We were hoping to have the site built by now, which would have made it easier to stop illegal encampments."

As well as 12 pitches, the site's planning permission includes parking for at least 24 vehicles and other facilities.

There will also be a dedicated site manager.

High Woods ward borough councillor Gerard Oxford disputed the overall cost of the project.

He said: "£1.7million was allocated in the capital programme, but I am told the build cost could be a total of £2.6million."

Mr Oxford said the cost could escalate through unexpected obstacles and said Essex Wildlife

Trust had asked for barriers to be put in as a planning condition to protect others from the work.

Jan Plummer, deputy chairman of Tending and Colchester Minority Ethnic Partnership, said: "We are really pleased that gipsies and travellers in Colchester are at last going to get the homes they need so they can settle and get access to education and health."

"This has been going on for decades now with no sites in Essex. These people deserve homes as human beings."

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We'll end up with ghetto on doorstep, says farmer

AN outraged farmer said the opening of the legal site would destroy his business.

Stewart St Clair Pearce, whose farm is next to the site, said it would create a "ghetto" on his doorstep.

In April, police were called to the site when travellers pitched there illegally.

Mr St Clair Pearce's sister, Tracy, was threatened by four men armed with a chainsaw who allegedly exposed themselves to her before one threatened to slit her throat.

One allegedly made threats to kill her and her animals.

Her brother said his business had already been forced to sell a lot of its rare cows and horses, in fear of threats to them made by travellers.

He added: "I am shocked, very



■ Angry – Stewart St Clair Pearce

disappointed and nobody has listened.

"The idea that localism takes notice of what local people want – it doesn't. Not even travellers want to be in this location. They are literally stuck in a field out of Colchester and I want to know where their kids are going to go to school. We have got a ghetto on our doorstep."

Severalls Lane site first earmarked 8 years ago

A TRAVELLERS' site previously existed at Haven Road, Colchester, but has been unoccupied since 2002.

In 2004, it was declared surplus to requirements and it was agreed the site should be transferred to Severalls Lane.

The land was chosen following three years of work by Colchester Council and Essex County Council, in which they identified a number of potential sites.

The Department for Communities and Local Government awarded a £1.9million grant to Essex County Council to develop Severalls Lane.

In 2007, a planning application for a 12-pitch site at Severalls Lane was agreed by planners.

Work had to start within three years and the permission expired on August 23 last year.

But the county council missed the deadline and had to reapply for planning permission.

However, last September the landowner, Colchester Council, agreed the lease terms of the site with the county council.

Planning permission was eventually granted by Colchester Council last November – despite more than 1,000 objections. Now the county council has placed an order for the site, meaning it has asked a construction company to create the facility.

Councillors have until July 25 to ask for the decision to be reviewed.

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Mark Randall
Area Manager